

## Prime Cuts of the Year (Part Two of Three)

Written by Jeff Angus

Monday, 24 March 2008 16:52 - Last Updated Wednesday, 26 March 2008 07:44

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In [Part I](#) , we looked at the [starting lineup](#) . Now, the rest of the forward lines...

*Zach Parise – Tomas Plekanec – Jason Pominville*

*Niklas Hagman – Ryan Kesler – Patrick Sharp*

*Steve Ott – Brandon Dubinsky – Milan Lucic* □

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The second unit is all about speed and tenacity. Zach Parise has that rare combination of will and skill that will lead to many 40-goal seasons, even playing for the offensively challenged New Jersey Devils. He is fantastic at creating plays out of nothing, and is a deadly finisher around the net.

Tomas Plekanec will center this line, and he has been arguably the biggest surprise in the NHL this season. His great play is due in small part to the emergence of Andrei Kostitsyn and the reemergence of Alex Kovalev, but Plekanec has been a horse for Montreal regardless of where he has lined up. He is a tireless worker in the defensive end, and has extremely underrated hands. Combine that with lightning fast speed and a deadly release, and Plekanec has all the makings of a future National Hockey League star.

And on the right side, Jason Pominville has been by far the most consistent player on the Sabres this season. Many had pegged him as a 30/30 guy and expected his goal totals to dip a bit with the departure of both Daniel Briere and Chris Drury. While his goal totals have dropped a bit, he has been distributing the puck and his assist totals are high. He is a heady offensive player and is extremely versatile. He is not the biggest guy on the ice but loves to go to the dirty areas to get goals and make plays. This second unit is young, fast, and will outwork nearly anyone they match up against.

The third line would be a pain in the rear to play against, and it also possesses the ability to light the lamp consistently. Niklas Hagman is a free agent at the end of this season and is due for a huge raise. He has scored some big, big goals for Dallas this season and is an accomplished defensive player. He hasn't scored this many goals since the 2000-2001 season for Karpat back in Finland. The Stars will be in tough to lock him up, as his services will be in hot demand.

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At center is my choice for the Selke Trophy this season, Ryan Kesler. Kesler can shadow any forward in the league and his hard work in the off-season at his offensive game has paid off. His vision, hands, and creativity still have a ways to go, but his speed and tenacity more than make up for it. He is one of the most hated players league-wide, as his chippy and abrasive style has not endeared him to many outside of Vancouver. Expect big things from Kesler in the post-season, if the Canucks make it.

The final member of this pseudo-checking line is another former defensive forward turned sniper. Patrick Sharp has been a threat every game for the inconsistent Hawks. He has scored a ton of goals, and leads the NHL in shorthanded markers. He has a laser release and is locked up long-term, which will give him the ability to play and develop further with Pat Kane, Jonathan Toews, and the rest of the Hawks young studs. Sharp started off as a defensive energy guy in Philadelphia, but has developed into a scoring winger with an edge. This line is made up of three terrific defensive forwards who have all had breakout seasons in the offensive end. It would not be fun trying to score – or defend – against these guys.

The fourth line will bring a lot of energy to this club. All three play feisty and aggressive, making them a perfect fit for the grind line. Just like the third line, the fourth is going to be patrolled by a Dallas Star on the left side. Steve Ott has developed into one of my most dynamic – and annoying – grinders to play against. He put up big numbers in the OHL (who wouldn't playing with Jason Spezza), and has shown some flashes at the NHL level. He will never score more than 15 goals, but has shown some versatility, even slotting in on a line with Mike Modano and Jere Lehtinen earlier this season.

Brandon Dubinsky, one of the bigger surprises this season, centers this line. He has outperformed both Chris Drury and Scott Gomez at times this season, and has been the best fit for the inconsistent Jaromir Jagr. Dubinsky plays with a chip on his shoulder and has offensive talent to boot. Look for him to bump his way up the Rangers depth chart permanently.

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The final member of this line is a player who I got to see develop firsthand as a member of the Vancouver Giants. Milan Lucic has followed an extremely steep development curve, he was toiling away in Junior B only a few years' ago, and now he is one of the most intimidating forces in the NHL. He has some offensive potential to boot, and with his shot could be a 20-goal man at some point. His real skill is smashing opposing defensemen on the forecheck or in a fight. Lucic's rough-and-tumble style has earned comparisons to Cam Neely by many B's fans. He will never be the offensive force that Cam was, but his impact may one day be just as big.

Stay tuned for the final segment, where I break down the rest of the defense, the backup goalie, as well as a few "honorable mentions."

Read the discussion on [Angus's Prime Cuts right here](#) in our forum...